

THE FATHER/CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

by

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ABSTRACT

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Crime is rampant in our society and the public wants it to stop. However, it is nearly impossible to put an end to a problem if we do not know it's beginning. There are numerous theories and accusations regarding the cause of crime. Lack of supervision, absent fathers, poverty, television and violent films have frequently been blamed by the media and the public for the high crime rate in this country.

If the reason for crime can be isolated and dealt with, the crime rate should be reduced. The purpose of this research is to examine the role fathers play in determining whether or not their children will commit a crime. Factors including affection, discipline, and quality of time spent with their children are examined. Implications for counseling interventions are discussed further.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The problem to be investigated in this study is the relationship between the interactions of a father with his child and the likelihood of the child committing a crime as an adult. The relationship a father has with his child is an important factor in determining the adjustment of the child as an adult.

Rosen (1985) states that historically there has been a structural focus on broken homes as a cause of criminal behavior. With one out of every two marriages today ending in divorce, it is easy to see why this approach was taken. McCord (1991), however, points out that criminal behavior may be a function of inadequate child rearing including lack of attachment and inappropriate or nonexistent discipline.

According to Van Voorhis, Cullen, Mathers, and Chenoweth Garner (1988), there have not been many studies that simultaneously compare family structure and family function and their impact on criminal behavior. Even in 2001, little research has been conducted regarding family influence over criminal behavior in general. Rosen (1985) and Van Voorhis, Cullen, Mathers, and Chenoweth Garner (1988) suggest that the entire social environment of a child factors into the risk of criminal behavior. This includes the broken home, supervision, affection, quality time spent with the father, and discipline. Other factors such as socioeconomic status and peer relationships also play a role in risk determination.

The findings from this study may aid therapists to better understand offenders and the family background they likely come from. Helping the client understand and accept his or her past experiences may prove valuable in the change process. Therapists may also look at offenders differently after learning the reasons behind why people become involved in criminal activities.

With an understanding of family influence, at risk families can be educated and counseled to function at the highest possible level to prevent their children from becoming involved in criminal activities during adolescence and adulthood. Even in families with children who are already displaying delinquency behaviors, education and counseling may assist the family in turning the child around and becoming a productive citizen.

Statement of Problem

This study will examine the relationship between the interactions of a father with his child and the likelihood of the child committing a crime. This relationship is examined through the use of a survey created by this researcher (see appendix B). The research hypothesis for this study states that children with a low quality functional relationship with their fathers will be significantly more likely to become repeat offenders as adults than those with a higher quality functional relationship. This functional relationship includes affection, discipline, supervision, and quality of time spent together.

The second research hypothesis for this study states that children with a low quality structural relationship with their fathers will be significantly more

likely to become repeat offenders as adults than those with a higher quality structural relationship. This structural relationship refers to living in a two parent, father present home and amount of time spent together.

Null Hypothesis

Ho1: There will be no significant difference in supervision by the father in adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders.

Ho2: There will be no significant difference in affection from the father in adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders.

Ho3: There will be no significant difference in discipline from the father during adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders.

Ho4: There will be no significant difference in time spent with the father during adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders.

Ho5: There will be no significant difference between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders for living in a two parent, father present home during adolescence.

Definition of Terms

broken home: Any family situation in which one of the parents is not present on a permanent basis.

deviance: Conduct that is perceived by society as violating established and widely respected normative expectations for behavior.

Electronic Monitoring Program (EMP): House arrest for felony offenders as an alternative to jail.

family function: Factors relating to the quality of family interaction including discipline, affection, supervision, and time spent together.

family structure: Factors relating to the physical placement of the child including parental absence, family size, and birth order.

Justice Volunteer Program (JVP): A first-time offender program in which participants attend counseling groups and anything else deemed appropriate by the case manager. The offender's record is cleared of charges upon completion of the program.

non-repeat offender: A person who has committed two or less crimes.

non-violent crime: Crimes against property or status crimes including disorderly conduct, driving while intoxicated, drug offenses, burglary, vandalism, and forgery.

repeat offender: A person who has committed three or more crimes.

status offense: So-called victimless crime including truancy, underage drinking and underage smoking.

violent crime: Crimes against people including battery, assault, robbery, rape, and murder.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

The relationship between the family and crime has been the subject of much research and debate. Popular opinion views family dysfunction as a major factor determining why people commit crimes (Public Management, 1997). This is, however, not necessarily the case. Factors such as divorce, death, and marital unhappiness generally do not, in isolation, increase the likelihood that a child will grow up to be a criminal. However, when these and other factors are combined, a correlation between them and crime can be found.

The role family structure and function play in determining whether or not a child will grow up to commit crimes is important to explore. Other factors such as biology, personality characteristics, and peer relationships also need to be considered when factoring risk level. These will be discussed in further detail in the following sections.

Family Structure and Crime

A broken home has long been associated with delinquency and crime. Newman (1999) reports that over the past 30 years the violent crime rate has risen paralleling the rise in children being raised in homes without a father. In fact, over 75% of prison inmates in any given facility come from a broken home (Korem, 1994).

Van Voorhis, Cullen, Mathers, and Chenoweth Garner (1988) suggest that broken homes generally contribute to more status offenses such as truancy,

running away, underage smoking and drinking than to violent offenses, although broken homes are a factor with violent offenders. This is, however, more true for girls than for boys. There are numerous reasons why broken homes contribute to crime. In single-parent homes, the family is likely to have a lower socioeconomic status than two-parent homes. The single parent generally must work to provide for the family. This often results in decreased supervision and monitoring of the children who then may look to deviant peers for structure and support.

The absence of the father can result in a feeling of deep loss of personal security. To circumvent this feeling of loss, children often become hostile and aggressive. Bynum and Thompson (1996) assert that this is particularly dysfunctional to the development of boys with divorced parents. The divorce may create anxiety over the boy's masculine identity and lead him into overemphasizing "manly" characteristics that are likely to result in antisocial behavior. Bynum and Thompson (1996) refer to this as compulsive masculinity. Paternal absence can also cause feelings of abandonment, unwantedness, and worthlessness. Girls' level of self-esteem is also related to the relationship they have with their fathers. Low self-esteem is associated with father absence and lack of involvement. This low self-esteem may lead the girl to deviant peer groups and criminal activity.

Korem (1994) states that in modern day society, there has also been a loss of extended family due to relocation and divorce. Several decades ago, the extended family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, lived close by the family and were able to assist in child rearing. This loss has caused many

families to turn to day care facilities, neighbors, or “latch-key children” situations where the children really may not be properly supervised. These children often do not complete homework, thus performing poorly in school. Further, by being alone, they often become bored and go looking for excitement. Lack of supervision and monitoring allows children to do whatever they want and often leads to partaking in criminal acts.

Birth order has also been suggested by Bynum and Thompson (1996) as a factor in delinquency and crime. Their studies have shown the middle child to be at higher risk of partaking in criminal behavior than the first and last born. This is due to the fact that the first child usually receives an enormous amount of attention because he or she is the only child. The last born is the baby of the family and receives attention because of it. The middle born can get lost in the process due to the amount of attention the others generally receive. This may lead the middle child to look for attention and self-esteem from deviant peers.

Family Function and Crime

Offenders in general appear to have more dysfunction within their families than non-offenders (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996). This is especially true for girls. Hoge, Andrews, and Leschied (1994) found girls to have significantly higher rates of family dysfunction than boys did. Family function is most often measured in terms of affection, supervision and monitoring, discipline, quality of time spent together, and presence of abuse and/or neglect. Van Voorhis, Cullen, Mathers, and Chenoweth Garner (1988) found affection, supervision, and overall home

quality to be the most strongly related factors to all forms of delinquency. Rowe & Flannery (1994) conducted a study that showed that parental affection and encouragement decreased the likelihood of delinquency.

In order for children to grow up happy, healthy and well-adjusted, they need to have experienced love and affection. When children are deprived of love and affection, they experience a poor sense of security and belonging and often have difficulty with healthy attachment. Bowlby's attachment theory states that the attachment relationship between a child and a caregiver allows a child to develop an awareness of the self and others. This is accomplished by the caregiver appropriately meeting the child's needs. When this does not happen, serious psychopathology may result (Atkinson & Zucker, 1997). These children are often violent, resistant, and manipulative and all too often develop antisocial behavior.

Rosen (1988) found marital happiness between parents to also be a contributing factor in crime. Children also need to experience appropriate mother/father interaction and affection to form strong healthy relationships with others. If a child is exposed to his or her parents fighting, the child will learn that love is not important and fighting is an appropriate way to get what you want. This, too, may lead to antisocial behavior.

Smid (2000) reports that inconsistent, coercive, or overly permissive parenting practices, along with insufficient supervision, allow disruptive and aggressive behavior in children to continue. Capaldi and Patterson (1996) cite the coercion model and lack of supervision as particularly problematic. The coercion

occurs when the parent makes a request to which the child negatively responds, and the parent then backs down and withdraws the request. This reinforces antisocial behavior in the child. Furthermore, this leads to problems at school and rejection by prosocial peers. The child then finds deviant peers who reinforce this antisocial behavior.

Seydlitz (1991) cites the power-control theory stating that when children have power and parents lack control, the child is free to deviate. Lack of supervision and discipline by the parents often leads to lack of self-control and risk-taking behaviors (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996). Children learn to be aggressive to get what they want.

Rosen (1985) found that boys who spent little quality time with their fathers were two times as likely to become delinquent than the boys that spent more quality time with their fathers. Quality time allows for role modeling by the father and also provides activities for the child so he or she does not get bored.

Rudo and Powell (1996) state that each year over six million children are abused and neglected. Victims of abuse and neglect are more vulnerable to alcohol and drug use, mental illness, early death, and criminal activity (McCord, 1991). This risk is heightened further if the parent is an alcoholic, drug abuser, criminal, or overly aggressive in general.

Children do not necessarily have to be the direct victims of abuse. Seeing another family member, such as the mother, be abused can also have detrimental effects on the child. Child maltreatment generally lessens the effect of parental reinforcement and credibility (Hall & Lynch, 1998). It also teaches the child that

violence and aggression are the ways to solve all problems. Further, these children learn that life has little to no value. Many of these children turn to deviant peers for comfort and support from the abuse they experienced. Abuse is among the leading reasons why children, especially girls, join gangs (Korem, 1994).

Bynum and Thompson (1996) further acknowledge that children are put at risk if one or both parents are severely dysfunctional themselves. This includes eating disorders, mental illness, addictions, and their own criminal activity. When one or both parents are severely dysfunctional, they are often preoccupied with their own problem. They may not have the time or energy required to appropriately parent their children. Severely dysfunctional parents may further provide poor role modeling for their children. If a parent is participating in criminal behaviors, the child may believe that it okay for him or her to also participate in criminal behaviors.

Inter-Relatedness Between Family Structure and Family Function

Rosen (1985) found that there were higher rates of delinquency with youth who had very little or poor father-son interaction, regardless of whether or not the father lived with the boy. This was most important for black males followed by family size, father presence in the home, and social class. For white males, social class emerged as the most important factor.

McCord (1991) found that children who had poor interaction with their father and poor supervision were more likely to become involved in criminal

activity as adults than those who had good parental interaction and supervision. Parental availability, supervision, and affection are important factors that influence the effectiveness of parental modeling, discipline, and reinforcement practices. Children are more likely to respond favorably to people with whom they have an attachment and with those for whom they have respect.

Van Voorhis, Cullen, Mathers, and Chenoweth Garner (1988) found that children who came from homes that were broken and dysfunctional were significantly more likely to commit drug offenses, property offenses including burglary and theft, and violent offenses including assault and rape. Furthermore, in intact homes marked by a higher occurrence of neglect and conflict, there was a higher incidence of delinquency found than in broken homes absent of neglect and conflict.

Rosen (1985) states that children with the highest potential for delinquency grow up in homes with overly strict, erratic, or lax discipline, an indifferent mother and/or father, and an unintegrated family with a weak bond formed between the parents and child. Furthermore, structure can affect function. If the father is not living at home, there may be conflict between the parents, discipline and supervision inconsistencies, and poor communication. One parent may be very lax in parenting while the other is strict. This allows the child room for manipulation of the parents, especially when communication between the parents is lacking.

Peer Relationships and Personality Factors Relating to Crime

For the most part, people seek out people to befriend that are like themselves. Often times, children at risk for deviant behavior seek out peers who are also at risk for deviant behavior. Hanson, Henggeler, Haebele, and Rodick (1984) found that involvement with a deviant peer group is strongly related to criminal activity, especially for children with an absent father. Children who receive poor discipline and supervision at home will find each other and no one will know what they are doing. They often turn to gangs to provide the structure they are lacking (Korem, 1994). These peers provide reinforcement of noncompliant and aggressive behavior.

Personality traits such as impulsivity, rebelliousness, and deceitfulness contribute to the rate of delinquency (Rowe & Flannery, 1994). Social and intellectual immaturity including low verbal skills often lead to failures in school and extra-curricular school activities, which increases the risk of joining a deviant peer group and committing criminal acts.

Locus of control may also play a role in understanding criminal behavior. People with an internal locus of control believe that the outcomes of their behavior occur due to their own behavior and personal characteristics. Whereas people with an external locus of control believe that they have no control over their behavior and outcomes of their behavior. They attribute outcomes to luck, chance, or fate, or that other people are controlling their behaviors (Rotter, 1990). People with an external locus of control are thus more likely to follow other people and take little personal responsibility for their actions. These people often

fail to see a connection between their poor behavior and the consequences they experience because of it.

Other Factors Influencing Crime

Biological abnormalities have been discovered in people with conduct disorders and antisocial personality disorder. The Harvard Mental Health Letter (2001) reports three major findings: a feeble stress response in the autonomic nervous system; lower than average frontal lobe (the area of the brain that controls judgment, planning, and decision making) activity as shown in brain scans; and lower than average levels of serotonin. Although further research is warranted, it appears as though these biological factors may impact whether or not a person will commit criminal acts.

The Role of Family Therapy in Reducing Crime

Therapy can be useful in combating crime. It is generally accepted that adolescents are more amenable than adults to the affects of therapy due to their age and the potential of controls by family and schools. This is especially true of adolescents who participate in family therapy. Children from families that participated in therapy, in addition to probation, to work through family problems proved to have a lower rate of recidivism as adults than the group on probation without therapy (Gordon & Graves, 1995). Parents can learn how to properly discipline their children to reduce noncompliant behavior. They also can learn the value of knowing where their children are, whom they are with, where they are

going, and when they will return. All of these things help reduce the risk that a child will become delinquent.

Summary

Overall, it has been suggested that fathers do have a direct bearing on whether their children will commit crime. Fathers who spend time with their children, show affection, and provide adequate supervision and discipline generally are going to help their children become responsible, well-adjusted adults. When this does not occur, the children are at risk of becoming criminals.

The hypothesis that children with a low quality functional relationship with their fathers will be significantly more likely to commit crimes as adults, as compared to those with a higher quality functional relationship, is supported by the reviewed literature. The second hypothesis that children with a low quality structural relationship with their fathers will be significantly more likely to commit crimes as adults, as compared to those with a higher quality structural relationship, is also supported by the reviewed literature.

The manner in which fathers interact with their children will have an effect on whether or not the child is at risk for committing a crime. It did not appear to matter if the father physically lived with the child, as long as the father appropriately interacted with the child on a regular basis. This appropriate interaction includes appropriate discipline, supervision, showing affection, and sharing quality time with the child.

The purpose of the present study is to determine whether or not there is a difference in the family structure and function between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders. A survey was given to offenders to assess the structural and functional relationship between them and their fathers.

Chapter III

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects for this study consisted of 49 people. All subjects are clients at a treatment facility for offenders on parole and probation, or are participants in the Justice Volunteer (JVP) or Electronic Monitoring (EMP) programs. There were 6 females and 43 males with an age range from under 18 through 40-49 with a mean age range 22-29. Of these, 27 are classified as non-repeat offenders, and 22 are classified as repeat offenders.

Instrumentation

A survey developed by this researcher was administered. It consisted of six demographic items and twenty-one Likert scale items. The Likert scale included five choices: 5 = always, 4 = most of the time, 3 = sometimes, 2 = rarely, 1 = never. This survey measured the quality of the father-child relationship in terms of supervision, affection, discipline, abuse, and time spent together. The physical presence of the father in the home was also addressed.

Supervision refers to whether or not the father knew the child's friends, what was going on in school, where the child was going and with whom, and what interests the child held. Affection refers to whether or not the father told his child that he loved him or her and gave hugs and kisses or other physical signs of affection. It also refers to whether the child knew that his or her father cared about him or her, and whether or not the child cared about his or her father.

Discipline refers to when the child misbehaved, did the father ignore it, reduce the child's privileges, scold the child, scream at the child, or physically punish or abuse the child. Time spent together refers to whether or not the father attended activities the child was involved in, talking to things that were important to the child or when the child had a problem, and doing things together that the child perceived as being fun.

Due to the fact that this survey was developed by this researcher specifically for this study, reliability and validity of the survey are unknown. Further testing of the survey could provide reliability and validity data.

Procedure

The survey was given at the treatment facility accompanied by a consent statement (see Appendix A) stating that participation in the study is voluntary and that all participants would remain anonymous. The consent statement and directions were read aloud to the participants as well. The surveys were given out in all Corrective Thinking psychoeducational groups at the facility by the group facilitators and took about five minutes to complete.

Analysis of Data

Each category (supervision, discipline, affection, and time spent together) consisted of five questions. The ratings for the five questions in each category were pooled into one rating. This resulted in a total possible rating of 25, and a minimum possible of 5 for each category. T-tests were performed on the data for

these categories. A chi-square test was conducted on the data regarding whether or not the offender lived in a two parent, father present home as an adolescent due to the fact that it was a yes or no question.

Limitations

Because there were few females completing the survey, the results of this study may not be able to be generalized to females. However, the proportion of males to females in this study was fairly close to the overall offender population throughout the country.

The entire population for this study came from Marathon County, Wisconsin and most were white. The results may not be able to be generalized to all racial groups and geographical areas.

The survey asked the participants to reflect back upon their adolescent years and self-report on the living situation they were in at the time, which for many participants was a very long time ago. As a result, this retrospection may have influenced the data.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the interactions of a father with his child and the likelihood of the child committing a crime. The research hypothesis for this study stated that children with a low quality functional relationship with their fathers will be significantly more likely to become repeat offenders as adults than children with a higher quality functional relationship with their fathers. This functional relationship includes discipline, affection, supervision, and abuse.

The second research hypothesis for this study stated that children with a low quality structural relationship with their fathers will be significantly more likely to become repeat offenders as adults than those with a higher quality structural relationship. This structural relationship includes living in a two-parent home and amount of time the father physically spent with the child.

Findings

Null Hypothesis 1

There will be no significant difference in supervision by the father in adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders.

There was significant difference found for supervision between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders $t(49)=2.35, p<.05$. The mean scores for repeat

offenders was (\underline{M} =12.045) and non-repeat offenders was (\underline{M} =16.556). As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected (see Table 1). Therefore, it was found that repeat offenders received less supervision during adolescence than non-repeat offenders. The fathers of repeat offenders knew less about what was going on with their children's school, friends, and activities than fathers of non-repeat offenders.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviation, and t -Test for Repeat Offenders versus Non-Repeat Offenders Related to Supervision

Variable	<u>Supervision</u>		df	t	p
	M	SD			
Repeat Offenders (22)	12.045	6.514	47	2.35	.02
Non-Repeat Offenders (27)	16.556	6.824			

Null Hypothesis 2

There will be no significant difference in affection from the father in adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders.

There was significant difference found for affection between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders $t(49)=2.72$, $p<.05$. The mean scores for repeat offenders was (\underline{M} =12.682) and non-repeat offenders was (\underline{M} =17.926). As a

result, the null hypothesis was rejected (see Table 2). Therefore, it was found that repeat offenders received less affection during adolescence than non-repeat offenders. The fathers of repeat offenders told their children they loved them and shared hugs and kisses less often than fathers of non-repeat offenders. The repeat offenders believed that their fathers cared about them less and they cared about their fathers less than non-repeat offenders did.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviation, and t -Test for Repeat Offenders versus Non-Repeat Offenders Related to Affection

Variable	<u>Affection</u>				
	M	SD	df	t	p
Repeat Offenders (22)	12.682	6.237	47	2.72	.01
Non-Repeat Offenders (27)	17.926	7.103			

Null Hypothesis 3

There will be no significant difference in discipline from the father during adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders.

There was no significant difference found for discipline between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders $t(49)=1.08$, ns. The mean scores for repeat offenders was ($\underline{M}=10.273$) and non-repeat offenders was ($\underline{M}=11.778$). As a

result, the null hypothesis could not be rejected (see Table 3). Therefore, there was no significant difference in discipline during adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders. Fathers of repeat and non-repeat offenders disciplined their children in much the same manner when they misbehaved.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviation, and t -Test for Repeat Offenders versus Non-Repeat Offenders Related to Discipline

Variable	<u>Discipline</u>				
	M	SD	df	t	p
Repeat Offenders (22)	10.273	4.920	47	1.08	>.10
Non-Repeat Offenders (27)	11.778	4.846			

Null Hypothesis 4

There will be no significant difference in time spent with the father during adolescence between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders.

There was significant difference found for time spent together between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders $t(49)=2.25$, $p<.05$. The mean scores for repeat offenders was ($\underline{M}=10.773$) and non-repeat offenders was ($\underline{M}=14.778$). As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected (see Table 4). Therefore, it was found that repeat offenders spent less time with their fathers during adolescence than

non-repeat offenders. Fathers of repeat offenders attended fewer activities that their children were involved in, talked with their children less about things that were important to the children, and did fewer things with their children that the children perceived as being fun than fathers of non-repeat offenders.

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviation, and t-Test for Repeat Offenders versus Non-Repeat Offenders Related to Time Spent Together

Variable	<u>Time spent together</u>				
	M	SD	df	t	p
Repeat Offenders (22)	10.773	5.362	47	2.25	.05
Non-Repeat Offenders (27)	14.778	6.801			

Null Hypothesis 5

There will be no significant difference between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders for living in a two parent, father present home during adolescence.

There was significant difference found between repeat offenders and non-repeat offenders for living in a two parent, father present home $\chi^2=4.294$, $p<.05$. 41% of the repeat offenders report living in a two-parent, father present home whereas 70% of non-repeat offenders report living in a two-parent, father present

home. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected (see Table 5). Therefore, it was found that repeat offenders lived in a single parent, father-absent home during adolescence more often than non-repeat offenders.

Table 5

Chi-square for Repeat Offenders versus Non-Repeat Offenders Related to the Presence of Both Parents in the home

Variable	<u>Two Parent Homes</u>		df	χ^2	p
	present	absent			
Repeat Offenders (22)	9	13	1	4.294	.05
Non-Repeat Offenders (27)	19	8			

Summary

The results of the data reveal a statistically significant difference in two of the three variables for the first hypothesis for this study, which focused on the functional relationship between fathers and their children. Significant difference was found for affection and supervision. There was no significant difference found for discipline. This suggests that if a father tells his children that he loves them and shares hugs and kisses with them, the children will be less likely to become criminals than those with fathers who do not do these things. This also suggests that if a fathers know what his children are involved in, where are they going, and who their friends are, the children will be less likely to become

criminals than those with fathers who do not do these things. It did not appear that the way a child was disciplined when he or she misbehaved contributed to criminal activity.

The second research hypothesis for this study, which focused on the structural relationship between fathers and their children was supported. Significant difference was found for both variables, living in a two parent, father present home and time spent together. This suggests that if the father lives in the same home as the child and spends time doing fun things with his child, attending his child's activities, and talks about things that are important to the child, the child will be less likely to become a criminal than those with fathers who do not provide these things. Further explanations for the results of this study will be reviewed in the following chapter.

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study to determine whether or not there is any relationship between the father's role in his child's life and the likelihood of the child committing a crime. The father's role included: affection, supervision, discipline, time spent with his child, and his physical presence in the home. It was hypothesized that repeat offenders would have poorer structural and functional relationships with their fathers than would non-repeat offenders. All variables except discipline were found to be significant in this study.

The reviewed literature stresses the importance of examining family structure and family function. McCord (1991) found that appropriate interaction between fathers and their children was crucial in the prevention of criminal activity. Van Voorhis, Cullen, Mathers, and Chenoweth Garner (1988) found that children who came from single parent, father absent homes that were also marked by dysfunction were much more likely to become involved in criminal activity than those from intact, functional homes. Rosen (1985) states structure can affect function through parental conflict, poor communication, and inconsistencies with supervision and discipline.

Discussion

For years, crime has been blamed on broken homes, poor neighborhoods, and lack of education. Fathers have come under fire for not physically being with

their children. In fact, significant difference was found with regards to father presence in the home and time spent with his child. However, there was also significant difference found with regards to affection and supervision from the father. The higher quality functional and structural relationship a father has with his children, the less likely they are to partake in criminal acts.

As therapists begin to understand the connection between the family and later criminal behavior, they may be able to interrupt a dysfunctional cycle and prevent the child from beginning a life of crime. This may be accomplished through family therapy, as suggested by Gordon and Graves (1995). The only way at risk families are going to be able to change is by understanding what outcomes may occur if they continue to do things the way they have been.

Discipline was not found to be statistically significant in this study. However, the reviewed literature shows a strong correlation. Smid (2000) and Capaldi and Patterson (1996) suggest that improper discipline practices such as coercion can be detrimental to teaching children self-control, thus leading to antisocial behavior. Sedlitz (1991) states that poor discipline by the parents takes away the parents' power and control and gives it to the child. This is similar to the problems coercive parenting perpetuates. Children learn to be aggressive and that if they persist long enough, they will eventually get their way. The discrepancy between the literature and this study could possibly be due to the way the questions regarding discipline and abuse were written on this survey. Further, there was only one question asked regarding abuse, whereas there were five questions relating to each of the other variables. Abuse has been shown to be an

important factor in determining risk for criminal behavior (Korem, 1994; Hall & Lynch, 1998; Rudo & Powell, 1996). Due to these discrepancies, further research is recommended.

Recommendations

Criminal activity is a serious problem that requires much attention. The following recommendations are issued to increase the future success of this study. There appears to be a relationship between fathers' interaction with their children and the likelihood of the children committing crimes. Further exploration into the various aspects of this relationship may aid therapists in working with families and offenders. This includes the areas of supervision, affection, time spent together, and whether or not the person grew up in a two parent, father present home. A test to more accurately assess discipline and abuse would be useful. Research into the fathers' background including education, criminal activity, the way he was raised, history of alcohol and other drug abuse, and mental illness may also be of use. Furthermore, this survey was administered in a very small geographical area and to a small sample size. Also, there were few females included in the sample size. Although the majority of offenders throughout the country are male, it may be beneficial to conduct a study consisting solely of females to get a clearer picture of issues surrounding female offenders. Increasing the geographic area and sample size would likely produce results that may be more generalized.

Most studies on the role family plays in crime focus solely on the family

structure and physical environment in which the child is living. Given the findings of this study, it appears that a thorough investigation into the effects of family function combined with family structure on criminal activity is warranted.

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Appendix A:**Consent for Survey Participation**

By returning this survey, I understand the following:

- I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study.
- There are no risks involved in completing this survey.
- The potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this survey.
- No identifiers are needed for this survey so confidentiality is guaranteed.
- I have the right to refuse participation in this study and may withdraw from participation at any time.

Questions or concerns regarding this survey should be addressed first to the researcher, Tracy Peterson, and second to the research advisor, Dr. Gary Rockwood at (715) 232-1303.

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Appendix B:**Research Survey**

****DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THIS SURVEY!!**

Please answer the following questions as completely as possible.

Unless given other directions, please circle one answer for each question.

1. Sex: Male Female

2. Age: Under 18 18-21 22-29 30-39 40-49 50 and over

3. Status: parole probation JVP EMP other (explain) _____

4. Please list ALL crimes that you have committed thus far in your life:

5. When you were between the ages of 12-16, with whom did you live?

mother only

father only

mother and father

mother and step-father

father and step-mother

foster parents

group home

detention center

other _____

6. If you did NOT live with your biological father, why not?

deceased

divorce

never married

removed from custody

7. How often did you see your biological father on average per week when you were between the ages of 12-16?

never

1-2 hrs

3-5 hrs

6-10 hrs

10-15 hrs

over 15 hrs

every other weekend

Please rate these statements using the scale that follows. Think back to when you were between the ages of 12-16.

5 = always
 4 = most of the time
 3 = sometimes
 2 = seldom
 1 = never

- _____ My father knew what was going on with my school.
- _____ My father knew my friends.
- _____ My father knew where I was and who I was with when I went out.
- _____ My father knew what activities I enjoyed doing.
- _____ My father attended activities that I was involved in (sports, concerts, shows, etc.)
- _____ My father told me that he loved me.
- _____ My father showed affection towards me (hugs, kisses, pats on the back, etc.)
- _____ When I had a problem or something bothered me, I talked to my father about it.
- _____ My father and I spent time discussing things that were important to me.
- _____ My father and I did fun things together.
- _____ My father encouraged me to do my best.
- _____ I knew that my father cared about me.
- _____ My father treated me fairly.
- _____ My father and I got along.
- _____ I cared about my father.
- _____ When I misbehaved, I was physically punished by my father.
- _____ When I misbehaved, I was screamed at by my father.
- _____ When I misbehaved, I was scolded by my father.
- _____ When I misbehaved, I was grounded or had reduced privileges by my father.
- _____ When I misbehaved, I was not punished by my father.
- _____ I was abused physically, emotionally or sexually by my father.